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AUTHOR Hanson, J. Robert
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ABSTRACT

The "Advocacy" planning game is intended to include the public in decision-making in the schools, as well as to educate the participants about pertinent solutions to students' needs. This planning game is predicated on the assumption that resources for education are limited and that, therefore, there must be a mechanism for determining school system priorities. Players are divided into five constituency groups (students, teachers, board members, administrative staff, and the community). They are distributed in these groups so that they may play roles different from their real life ones. The game is divided into three rounds, during which educational needs and objectives, as well as corresponding process needs and goals (intended to achieve the educational objectives) are negotiated and prioritized. The participants may bargain and attempt to persuade other groups to support their chosen goals. The final result is a list of matched and ranked products and processes. This list then becomes the school system's developmental blueprint for the coming year. (Author/DS)

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ADVOCACY - A COMMUNITY PLANNING GAME FOR THE RANKING OF SCHOOL SYSTEM GOALS AND TRAINING NEEDS

J. Robert Hanson

Educational Planning, Management

and Evaluation Consultant

I. Introduction

The "Advocacy" planning game is one more step in a growing trend to include the public in decision-making areas formerly ruled by specialists. Recent examples of the public's entry into social policy decision-making includes consumer protection (the meat boycott), public safety (Nader's Raiders, et al) and legislative issues ("Common Cause", taxpayers associations, etc.).

"Advocacy" also represents a fundamental shift in public policy determination in that the total community--taxpayers, parents, staff and students--are involved in assessing both the needs of young people and determining the goals the schools are to service.

But why a planning game? There are three reasons:

1. there must be an agreed upon mechanism for determining school system priorities since resources do not allow all concerns to be treated at the same time;

2. there must be a way to include in the decision-making process all the people affected by the educational system--particularly students and the community that finances the schools;

3. there needs to be a way to include in the school system's thinking the educational goals identified by the State Department of Education, and approved by the State Board.

The result of playing "Advocacy", or nearly any type of educational planning game, is that 1) the school system will have prioritized goals and 2) an agreed upon procedure for using its resources in a way that a) focuses on the client--the student, and b) represents the involvement of the total educational community: parents, teachers, school administrators, students and the larger community.

II. A planning game

"Advocacy" is an interaction game. Unlike board games ("Monopoly", chess, etc.) or simulation games (computer or data bank-assisted), "Advocacy" is built around people interacting with one another and then recording their actions on a board, rather than having

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the board (via die, spinners, etc.) determine their actions for them.

The name of the game comes from the fact that participants are asked to consider the students' needs from a position other than, possibly, the one they may be most familiar with. The game is not, however, to be confused with role-playing. In role-playing participants are asked to demonstrate pre-determined behaviors, often purposely hidden from the other participants, for purposes generally resulting in a conflict situation which can then be resolved. In "Advocacy" the assumption is made that conflict already exists since there are no community-approved goals or procedures for the operation of most school systems, and that the acknowledged lack of such approved procedures results in conflict through the public's non-involvement or misunderstanding. "Conflict" is a constant in all human relationships, and when addressed constructively can be seized as an opportunity for resolution and progress. Therefore, the game assumes disagreement even to the point of agreeing to disagree, but disagreeing within the rules of the game, i.e., that the democratically achieved final ranking of needs and goals will be personally "owned" by the game's participants.

Participants are assigned to constituency tables advocating educational needs resulting from the community-wide needs assessment process. For example, tables would be identified as "teachers", "administrators", "students", "Board members", etc. Those assigned to each table, however, would constitute a mix of representatives from all the various constituencies in order that a balanced representation of personnel would be present at each table. This mixed representation is critical if the community's participation is to be taken seriously in policy-making, and more particularly if the school system is to become student or client-centered. The mixing of constituency representatives, therefore, provides for: 1) increased interaction between members of the educational process, 2) a method for resolving conflict, and 3) possibly a more objective analysis of training needs for particular constituency groups.

"Advocacy" is an educational as well as a planning game. The game's several purposes also include educating the community toward more pertinent solutions to young people's needs, and away from some of the authoritarian attitudes their own education may have fostered in them.

III. Game Organization

As gamers arrive they register, receive a name tag, and are assigned to a constituency table. There are five constituencies in most school systems: 1) students; 2) Board members; 3) teachers and

and support staff; 4) administrative staff (including clerical and custodial support personnel); and 5) the community.

Constituencies represent both the groups from which educational needs have been solicited and those who will generally desire additional training in light of the new or revised educational priorities resulting from the planning game.

A central factor in "Advocacy" is the recognition that "new occasions teach new duties", or more specifically that with the clarification of school system priorities the roles of all personnel change. These approved changes then inevitably require the development of new skills, and thus the total educational community--the five constituencies--act in concert to determine what training priorities need attention in order to implement those agreed upon changes. For example, if a high ranked goal was "...to more effectively prepare senior high school students for the selection of a career..." then it would probably be necessary to train guidance counsellors, teachers and selected community representatives in effective methods of re-orienting the curriculum, finding out-of-school opportunities for site visitations, and bringing guidance personnel up-to-date on the entry requirements for many different types of jobs. Or, if the game results in a high ranked need to "...individualize instruction for each student..." then teachers, administrative staff and Board members would need training in curriculum design, new patterns for supervision, and the introduction of programmed budgeting, etc.

In short, it is unrealistic to expect prioritized needs responsive to vastly accelerated social change to be effectively implemented without taking seriously the need for assisting all levels of personnel in obtaining new skills and attitudes.

IV. Playing the Game

The game is divided into an introduction and three rounds.

The introduction consists of a rapid overview of the needs collection process, and often there is some type of audio-visual presentation to explain the rules of the game.

Round I Ranking of Product Needs/Goals (white cards)

The game facilitator at each table introduces the goals resulting from the community-wide needs collection process. These are goals which are focused on student achievement and are the "outcomes" or "products" of the school system. These product needs have been converted to cards with one need or goal on each card. Each goal also has a number weighting, and, of course, the name of the constituency for which outcomes-products are being recommended.

The group then begins a discussion process resulting in the ranking of each individual goal. This ranking is accomplished by:

1) the facilitator presenting the goal and answering questions
2) the group discussing and ranking the goal by placing it on a numbered mat (mats are numbered from +5 to -5 -- "extremely important" is a +5, "moderately important" is a +3, etc.)

The group may change its collective mind as often as it wishes during the allotted time period. The facilitator will be responsible for keeping his group on schedule in order that all product needs will be "matted" by the end of the round.

At the end of Round I, the matted needs are collected by messengers and are delivered to the game manager's table. Here the needs are tabulated and are immediately fed back to the tables by closed circuit TV monitors. Additionally, the totals are posted on a chalkboard.

During the first intermission, gamers will be able to compare how their high ranked goals fared in comparison with the other tables.

Round II Process Needs/Goals (yellow cards)

The second round follows a similar process with the cards being matted after explanation and discussion. In the second round, however, the group will be prioritizing proposed training procedures for the outcome goals that ranked highest in Round I.

It is the facilitator's responsibility to see that only those process goals are ranked that are responsive to goals that survived Round I.

Again, at the conclusion of Round II, the matted cards are collected, tabulated and fed back to the tables on the TV monitors.

Round III Final Ranking of Product and Process Goals

In the last round the product and process goals surviving the first two rounds will be re-ordered. In some instances there may be high-ranked product goals without correspondent process goals. The lack of a process counterpart does not reduce the product goal's value.

The facilitator will introduce both cards in a set (one product-white, and one process-yellow) for matting at the same time.

At three points during Round III (every 15 minutes) the game manager will announce the changing scores for the sets surviving Round II. In this way each table may be kept abreast of what is happening at all the other tables.

At any time during the game, participants may send messages via "runners" to other tables requesting support for particular goals. The responding table will then "negotiate" some form of exchange or trade for their particular favorites, i.e., advocating the approval of certain outcomes and their counterpart training components.

Additionally, new goals may be introduced by a table (a constituency) and proposed before the entire group via the public address system. Also, a goal rejected in Round I may be recalled, or rewritten, and proposed for reconsideration through the public address system and/or via group to group negotiation.

Any gamer may go to the microphone at any time to speak for 90 seconds advocating a particular product or process goal.

Spaces are reserved in the room for small groups to caucus during each round, and between rounds. It is important, however, that not more than two group members be absent from their respective tables at a given time. The absence of more than two members effectively restricts the remaining players from matting the remaining goals.

At the end of Round III the matched sets of ranked products/processes are submitted to the game manager, are tabulated, and as a result of a total number of points secured for each product goal are placed in a ranked order from highest to lowest.

This listing then becomes the school system's developmental blueprint for the following year. Needs ending up in a position too low for inclusion in Year I may then be scheduled for Year II, and so on.

School systems are encouraged to replay the game at two year intervals in order to sustain community interest and support and to assist the district in keeping current on student needs.

At no point does the ordered ranking of goals foreclose administrative responses to crises. Hopefully, a well-planned and executed planning procedure will reduce the number of emergencies that arise.

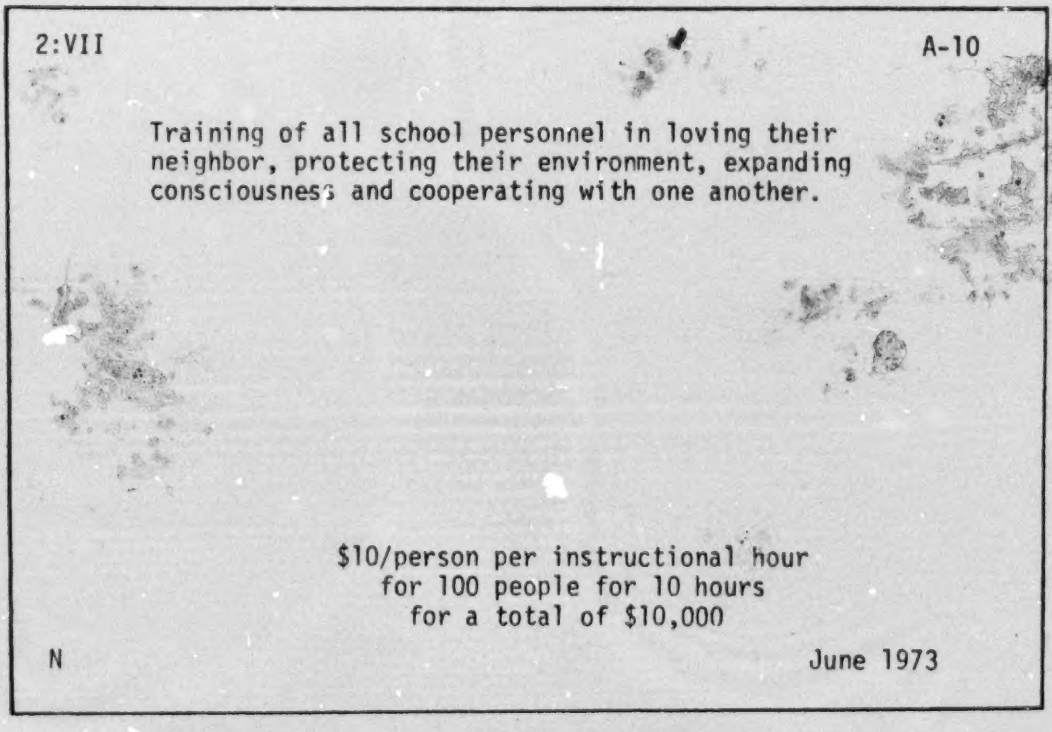
VI. Decoding the Advocacy Cards

Reading the cards is easy. The cards have been coded with the layman in mind.

In the upper left-hand corner is an Arabic number which indicates the importance the constituency which submitted the card placed on the goal. The Roman numeral is the number of the submitting constituency; hence, in our sample shown below this is the second highest need submitted by Constituency Seven. In the upper right hand corner is a letter which indicates how important the need was interpreted to be by all the constituencies submitting needs in the assessment process. This sample card's needs were in Category "A" representing the highest level of need, i.e., it occurred the most often among needs submitted by all the constitutuencies.

The number appearing next to the letter indicates the need's correspondence with the State's product and process goals. For example, if a 10 point value appears there is a complete correspondence (5--partial and 3 or less a minimal correspondence) between the need and the State's approved goal structure.

The lower left-hand corner contains either an "N" or a "T". This means the goal is new to the operation of the school system, or that the program now exists (T) but is in need of upgrading.


2:VII
A-10
Training of all school personnel in loving their neighbor, protecting their environment, expanding consciousness and cooperating with one another.
$10/person per instructional hour
for 100 people for 10 hours
for a total of $10,000
N
June 1973

The costs of training needs are estimates based on current expenses. The time designation is an estimate of when the need might be implemented if approved. The card also specifies how many need to be trained, and approximately how long the training will last for a total dollar amount.

General Notes

The figures for costs and numbers of people involved can be increased or decreased based upon the group's assessment of the goal's importance.

Groups will not be given the names of the constituencies submitting particular needs in order that each goal be examined and discussed on its own merit.

The number and letter coding is for the gamer's guidance only. Gamers are to make up their own minds about the importance of each need.